

WASHINGTON SMART GROWTH ALLIANCE

SMART GROWTH RECOGNITION PROGRAM CRITERIA

Introduction

The Smart Growth Alliance is a collaborative partnership of the Urban Land Institute - Washington, the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the Greater Washington Board of Trade, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and the Metropolitan Washington Builders' Council. Its mission is to research, identify, and encourage land use development and transportation policies and practices that support smart growth. To facilitate this mission, the Alliance has developed a project recognition program.

This program recognizes specific development proposals that exemplify smart growth characteristics. To be considered for recognition, a proposed project will be carefully evaluated against a series of *comprehensive* standards established by the Alliance. Applications for program recognition are analyzed by a select review committee composed of regionally diverse representatives from a broad base of backgrounds and interests.

Carrying this recognition indicates that the project helps the Washington region accommodate growth in a manner that achieves economic, environmental, and quality-of-life objectives. By recognizing the value of proposed projects, the recognition program encourages developers, citizen groups, and elected officials to strive for smart growth. While there are other good development projects in the region, it is the intent of this program to highlight only those that are on the cutting edge of smart growth.

The following are the project criteria that are specific to the project's design. A set of questions tailored to each criterion will help the project sponsor determine whether each criterion has been met.

Base Criteria (Prequalifying Standards):

At a minimum, a proposed project must meet *all* of these five criteria:

Location: The project must be in an area designated and appropriate for growth or revitalization, most particularly for infill development or sites adjacent or close to developed residential or commercial areas. It should take advantage of existing or short-term planned public water and sewer service, and should be accessible to public transportation.

Density, Design, and Diversity of Uses: The three Ds of good, smart growth development must be present, either within the proposed project or in the vicinity. That is, a project or an area must have sufficient density and scale to support a mix of uses, walkability, and public transit. The project should be designed so that it is integrated into the existing community fabric.

Transportation/Mobility/Accessibility: The project should be designed, located, and programmed to offer alternatives to single occupancy vehicle trips, by

enabling safe and effective pedestrian and bicycle access to multiple uses and activities and by being accessible to public transportation.

Environment: The project should effectively protect, conserve, or mitigate damage to open space, water, and air quality, and important ecosystem components.

Community Assets: The project should generate benefits for the surrounding area or the host community. These may include positive economic impacts, affordable housing, support for the school system, historic preservation, public access to parks or open space, support for local efforts to encourage alternative transportation, adaptive reuse of obsolete buildings, or other improvements to the quality of community life.

In addition to the above criteria, the development team (developer, designers, engineers, and other consultants) should demonstrate a track record of high-quality performance and proven experience. It also should have a record of completing projects on schedule and according to plan.

Criteria

Following are the criteria that all selected projects must meet. Each criterion is accompanied by several questions. While not all projects must address all of the questions, a preponderance of positive answers will be required to win recognition.

1. **Location.** The project should be developed in an area where growth is desirable.



- ☐ Is the project in an area designated for growth, intensification, or revitalization by the local jurisdiction?
- ☐ Is the project a redevelopment or renovation on a site with previous disturbance?
- ☐ Is the site within or to be annexed to a city or town, or is it within a designated town center or village area, or will it effectively connect to a neighborhood, community, or town center?
- ☐ Is the development within a current or planned public sewer and water service area, and when will it be serviced by public sewer and water?

2. Density, Design, and Diversity of Uses.



2a. Density. *The project should have overall moderate to high density.*

- ☐ Will net density¹ exceed the density of the surrounding area?
- ☐ Is density sufficient to encourage mixed uses, walking, biking, use of civic spaces, increased public transportation, and the reduction of single-occupancy vehicle trips?
- ☐ Will a project located within a half-mile of a fixed-rail station be dense and varied enough (compared with existing uses in the adjacent area) to help the neighborhood support 12- to 18-hour activity?
- ☐ Will an infill project located farther than a half-mile from a fixed-rail station or town be dense and varied enough (compared with existing uses in the adjacent area) to enliven the area, support public transportation, and take advantage of existing public infrastructure?
- ☐ In suburban areas, will the residential density of the project or of expanding communities be high enough to support some retail, employment, civic uses, and increased public transportation in the community and does it allow for mixed uses?
- ☐ In rural/village/small town areas, will density be sufficient to support and enhance existing development and use existing public infrastructure efficiently?

¹ Net density represents the level of concentration (high or low) of buildings, including their total volume, within a given area, excluding land for streets, public playgrounds, and open space. Often expressed as a ratio, residential density is expressed as dwelling units/acre; nonresidential density is expressed as floor/area ratio (FAR).

The density guidelines are based on **typical** net densities for each development type, shown in the table. Pending the work with the pilot projects, these densities will **guide** the review committee's evaluation.

Density Guidelines

Location	Residential Component	Employment Component
Within 0.5 mile from fixed-rail station	Multifamily Exceeds 25 dwelling unit per acre	Between 1.5 and 3 FAR or higher Highest densities concentrated at rail station
Farther than 0.5 mile from fixed-rail station	Single-family detached units: 5 single-family, detached units per acre if the project consists only of single-family homes; 7 single-family detached units per acre for a development with mixed housing types. 15 single-family, attached homes per acre 25 multifamily, attached units per acre	Exceed a 1 FAR
Suburban areas	Exceeds 7 dwelling units per acre	Some exceed 0.5 FAR
Rural/village/small town area	4 dwelling units per acre	No density target

2b. Design. The design of the project should be of high quality and should respect the visual character of the surrounding area.



- ☐ Is the project designed to relate to and integrate with the surrounding community and not create an isolated enclave?
- ☐ Will the project's visual character respect and make a positive contribution to the surrounding community?
- ☐ Will the project include street trees, inviting street frontage, attractive street lighting, and human-scale streetscapes so that pedestrians feel safe and are buffered from traffic?
- ☐ Will the project use lighting mechanisms that do not pollute the night sky?
- ☐ Will the project incorporate *usable* public open space and public civic spaces?
- ☐ Does the project's parking design promote pedestrian-friendly environments and lend to good-quality design by concentrating parking at the rear of buildings, underground, or in garages, and/or by using landscaping and other techniques to maintain high aesthetic qualities?

2c. Diversity. Although mixed-use projects are preferred, at a minimum, the project should add to the mix of uses in its surrounding area.



- ☐ Will the proposed land uses help to balance the jobs, housing, and services mix of the surrounding community?
- ☐ If the project is located within a half-mile of a fixed-rail transit system or an area of a single land use type, will the proposed development balance the jobs, housing, and services mix with the uses already there?
- ☐ If the project is located farther than a half-mile from a fixed-rail transit system or near an area of a single land use type, will the project offer an effective internal mix of residential and commercial uses?
- ☐ Will the project promote vertical integration of land uses, for example, housing above stores, or is there more than one use type in a single building?

- 2d. Affordable Housing².** If the project has a residential component, a mix of housing for all income levels should be encouraged.



- ☐ Will the development encourage and produce a mix of housing types for a range of income levels?
- ☐ Will the development provide at least 10 to 15 percent of affordable housing?

² As defined by the local jurisdiction.

3. **Transportation, Mobility, Accessibility.** The project should offer alternatives designed to reduce dependency on single-occupancy vehicle use.



- ☐ Is the project designed and located within a half-mile of other land uses and transportation options to encourage residents and workers to walk or bike to school, parks, shops, and services and to use public transit?
- ☐ Is there safe and direct pedestrian and bicycle access through well-marked crosswalks on site and links to external areas?
- ☐ Does the pedestrian/bicycle design include landscaped, lighted trails that are independent of the street or highway edge and that go to adjoining communities and neighborhoods, and to other trail systems?
- ☐ Will the project design support and encourage internal circulation and local pedestrian use (i.e., provide sidewalks between residences and other land uses, streetscaping, and traffic calming) and bike travel?
- ☐ Are the project's internal transportation connections linked (e.g., do they connect paths, sidewalks, or transit routes with each other?), and will its design and location enable the creation, extension, or improvement of additional public or private transit in the community?
- ☐ If congestion is a problem, will the project contribute to/participate in transportation demand management and/or provide incentives for transit use?
- ☐ Will the project minimize street widths and off-street parking by using good design, shared parking concepts, and transportation management techniques?

- ☐ If the project is located within a half-mile of transit, will it reduce parking?
- ☐ Will the project use structured parking where transit is located?
- ☐ Does the development support external vehicular, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian connections?

- 4. Environment.** The project should be sensitive to existing environmental features and protect natural resources where feasible. Where possible, sustainable design features should be incorporated into the project's design.



- ☐ Will the project sensitively protect, or contribute to the protection of, wetlands, forests, agricultural lands, and aquifer recharge areas and sustain areas of unfragmented ecosystems?
- ☐ Will the project protect existing stream and river buffers or create new buffers?
- ☐ Will the project avoid disturbing steep slopes (more than 15 percent) and highly erodible or unstable soils?
- ☐ Will the project incorporate natural or engineered solutions to prevent (or reduce existing) nonpoint source pollution within a single, small watershed?
- ☐ Does the project reduce stormwater runoff by providing for on-site water retention, infiltration or staged release? Does the project incorporate a green roof? Does the project re-use gray water? Does the project contribute to off-site stormwater retrofits or other stormwater reduction solutions?
- ☐ Will the project protect or restore a variety of on-site habitat, particularly for threatened or endangered species?
- ☐ Will the project's open-space areas be connected to protect green infrastructure?
- ☐ Will the project, by its location and design, help reduce air pollution?
- ☐ Does the project systematically protect existing trees?

- ☐ Are sustainable design techniques that will conserve and protect water, energy, air quality, and land incorporated into the project?
- ☐ Will the developer or owner apply for LEEDS certification, and if so at what level?
- ☐ Will the project reduce construction waste or use recycled materials?

5. **Community Assets.** The project should benefit and enhance the existing community.



5a. Benefits. *A range of benefits should be considered.*

- ☐ Will the project fulfill the goals of an approved community revitalization or development plan?
- ☐ Will the project offer the community a significant quality-of-life benefit such as a park, a school site, a civic structure or use?
- ☐ Will the project offer a significant benefit to the arts community by creating exhibition space, theaters, studios, or other features?
- ☐ Will the project offer the community a significant economic benefit such as jobs, tax base, cultural arts, etc.?
- ☐ Will the project help support or benefit existing schools?
- ☐ Will the project connect its open space internally, and will it link its open space to external or community open-space resources?
- ☐ Will the project retain, restore, and incorporate existing historic structures and sites?
- ☐ Will the project work to retain or relocate any displaced business and residents?

- 5b. Participation.** The developer should encourage substantial community participation during the development process.



- ☐ Has the jurisdiction provided for meaningful community participation in planning and design review?
- ☐ Has the developer worked responsibly with local groups to identify and resolve local concerns and needs?
- ☐ Does the developer have a plan for community participation?
- ☐ Does the developer have written support, e.g., letters from community members and groups?